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Propose release additional portions ~~pp 3,4~~ Schneider D32

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~/NOCONTRACT/ORCON

~~KH~~ See Philippines comment re ~~pp~~ 3,4 to me

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INR WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS
OF DEVELOPMENTS IN HUMAN RIGHTS

No. 35, December 13, 1977

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LATIN AMERICA

Argentina

Possible Christmas Amnesty? During courtesy calls last week on several Cabinet ministers and the Army Chief of Staff, Ambassador Castro repeatedly encountered two themes:

--a major release of state-of-siege detainees will probably take place at Christmas; and

--the denial of FMS credits and grant military training is of little importance to Argentina, but a prohibition on commercial purchases of training, spare parts, and equipment would work a serious hardship.

Interior Minister Harguindeguy stated that he was considering 675 prisoner cases for possible release at Christmas. He described the process as part of the government's ongoing effort to reduce the number of state-of-siege prisoners to a minimum. General Harguindeguy also told Ambassador Castro that there are now 3,667 state-of-siege detainees (down from a reported 4,500 a few weeks ago), 190 of whom are foreigners.

In a related development, the ICRC and the Argentine Government have reached an agreement whereby the ICRC will resume on December 12 a program of visiting prisons that was halted last April. (CONFIDENTIAL, Buenos Aires 9280, 9282, 9276, 9294, December 7)

INR Comment: A large-scale Christmas amnesty would be an encouraging sign of moderation in Argentina's human rights practices. It should not be treated, however, as an immediate harbinger of a full return to the rule of law. Any prisoners released undoubtedly will have been certified as minimal security risks. Prisoners still considered risks probably will have to await effective functioning of the "right of option" procedures under which they may petition for expulsion. The "right of option" mechanism has been restructured, but its operation is hindered both by doubts among some government authorities as to the wisdom of releasing security prisoners, as well as the difficulty prisoners encounter in finding willing host countries. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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